UNITED NATIONS

Distr.
GENERAL

SG/CONF.7/3
15 June 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON MINE CLEARANCE
Geneva, 5-7 July 1995
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*
High-level segment

BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THE PLENARY SESSION ON ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNITED NATIONS DEMINING STANDBY CAPACITY

Note by the Secretariat

SUMMARY

In his report on assistance in mine clearance (A/49/357 and Add.1 and 2), the Secretary-General noted that the United Nations had often found it necessary to request in-kind contributions from Member States to support United Nations mine-action programmes. The report noted the difficulties with obtaining such resources on an ad hoc basis, and the Secretary-General proposed the establishment of a United Nations demining standby capacity to be administered by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. The purpose of this standby capacity would be to create a structure that would enable the United Nations to utilize quickly and efficiently contributions of personnel, equipment, facilities, and special expertise to improve the effectiveness of United Nations mine-action programmes. In the interests of cost-efficiency, it was decided to keep this standby capacity structure simple and, therefore, stockpiling of equipment was ruled out. What emerged instead, was a concept akin to an international register of equipment, personnel and other resources that Member States would make available to the United Nations on short notice. As the scope of United Nations mine-action programmes is broad and varied, so too the types of equipment and expertise that are required for the United Nations standby capacity are broad and varied. It is believed that the structure for the demining standby capacity outlined in the present paper will be simple and flexible enough to cover these varied needs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations has always relied heavily upon Member States for the provision of expert personnel and specialized equipment to staff and equip United Nations mine-action programmes. During the course of Operation Salam in Afghanistan in 1988, personnel contributed by Member States to work with the United Nations Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes relating to Afghanistan began pioneering the mine-clearance and mine-awareness training methods that have since become normal operating procedures for the United Nations.

2. In Cambodia, this experience was repeated when military personnel, contributed to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, established demining schools and began training indigenous deminers. Specialized personnel working with United Nations humanitarian organizations helped to establish and run the Cambodian Mine Action Centre. In Mozambique, military personnel from four Member States established and ran the Mine-Clearance Training Centre, which trained almost 500 indigenous deminers in a six-month period. In addition, military personnel attached to the United Nations humanitarian assistance programme in Mozambique established and continue to help to run the accelerated demining programme. Without the provision of such contributions in kind, United Nations mine-action programmes, in their present form, would not have been possible.

3. While mechanisms and structures to facilitate the contribution of personnel, equipment and expert advice have been most fully developed in the context of troop contributions to peace-keeping operations, this is not the case in other United Nations operations. This is particularly relevant to United Nations humanitarian mine-action programmes, which are often established in areas in which no peace-keeping mandate exists or, where there is a peace-keeping operation, are required to continue well after the peace-keeping mandate ends.

4. In the past, this has caused considerable problems in creating the necessary legal and administrative arrangements to permit donor States to contribute personnel and other resources to United Nations mine-action programmes. In addition, the United Nations has often been unable to respond as quickly as would be desired to requests for assistance from mine-affected countries, because of the requirement to negotiate the appropriate legal and administrative mechanisms to accept contributions of personnel and equipment.

5. It was for this reason that, in his report on assistance in mine clearance (A/49/357 and Add.1 and 2), the Secretary-General stated that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs would explore the possible establishment of a standby capacity for demining and land-mine-related activities. Such a standby capacity would give the United Nations the ability to draw quickly and efficiently upon resources in personnel, equipment, facilities and specialized expertise provided as contributions by Member States and interested organizations to support demining and land-mine-related activities, both at Headquarters and in the field.

6. Contributions of military personnel and equipment may be easiest for many States to designate, but they should also consider drawing upon the vast reservoirs of experience available in the non-military sector to provide assistance in areas such as programme management, administration, logistics, training, budgeting, personnel management, marketing (for mine-awareness training campaigns), communications, etc. It is also hoped that non-governmental and other organizations interested in this area would, as their capacities and funds permit, contribute to the standby capacity in these areas as well.

II. MODALITIES

7. In many operations, the United Nations has sought to obtain direct support for mine-action assistance programmes through contributions in kind of personnel and equipment. Certain elements of mine-action programmes are of limited duration and some require specialized expertise or technology, such as technical assessments and surveys or mine-awareness campaigns. Certain training tasks, such as the training of medical, logistical, management and administrative support personnel for mine-action programmes could also be of limited duration, although they, too, require specialized expertise.

8. Other elements, like the establishment of a communications network or medical support for demining teams, could be furnished on an in-kind basis. The contribution of expert personnel to serve in or advise mine-action programmes in the field, or the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs at Headquarters, is another example of non-monetary contributions that could have a significant impact. In addition, the contribution of access to facilities on which mine-clearance technology could be assessed or personnel given specialized training, would add significantly to the flexibility of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in the creation and support of mine-action programmes. In all these areas, the ability to match quickly existing capacities with critical needs as they arise will greatly enhance the effectiveness and productivity of mine-action programmes.

9. In addition, the standby capacity could serve as a register to facilitate the provision of bilateral assistance. It may turn out, for example, that a mine-affected country may request specific expertise or equipment that the United Nations is unable to provide, but which a Member State or organization has indicated that it would be willing to provide. Such assistance could include providing training and equipment to military organizations or providing assistance that the United Nations does not have the administrative capability to provide. In such cases, it could be possible for the United Nations to act as an informal conduit to notify the donor country that a mine-affected country is seeking such assistance. After this, of course, it would be up to the Member State or organization to work out the modalities of a bilateral agreement.

III. STRUCTURE

10. In designing the structure of this standby capacity, one of the key considerations guiding the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was the desire to keep the structure simple and streamlined. The objective was not to create a huge stockpile of resources that would, in and of itself, require the services of a large bureaucracy, but rather to tap efficiently into that pool of resources that Member States and organizations have already indicated that they are willing to provide. It was decided to utilize existing United Nations standard operating procedures and administrative modalities wherever possible, to provide a framework in which the standby capacity will operate. Finally, every attempt was made to keep the standby capacity as cost-effective as possible.

11. In the suggested design, the demining standby capacity requires a combination of elements for mine clearance, mine awareness, training and support functions and medical and rehabilitation support. These will constitute a pool of available in-kind resources designated by donor States. It is not envisioned that equipment will be stockpiled in one central location - as is the case with the existing standby capacity of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for natural disasters. Rather, contributors would designate equipment, personnel, facilities, etc. that would be made available to the United Nations on an as-needed basis. Until such time as these resources are required for deployment, donor Governments would be responsible for their storage and maintenance.

12. The payment of transportation costs to the needed location would also normally be borne by donors, although it is possible that, in certain cases, support for such transportation costs could be provided from the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance or as an in-kind contribution from another Government. The provision of funding for such transportation costs would be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, and would depend heavily upon the resources available. Donors would be responsible for the payment of salaries, the provision of housing (tentage) and subsistence and appropriate insurance for the personnel and material.

13. The register of in-kind contributions provided by donor States will be maintained in the central database of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. This database will have the capacity to correlate available resources with requests from mine-affected countries and United Nations programmes, as well as to provide comprehensive lists of such resources for use in planning future operations. Entries will be placed in the register upon the receipt of formal written offers of such contributions. Such offers will contain a description of the contribution, the lead-time required before a resource could actually be deployed and the duration for which such contributions would be available. Any restrictions on the use or function of the contribution will also be clearly stated. In the case of a contribution involving equipment, it is necessary that there be a clear statement as to whether or not such equipment could be left behind with the recipient country's deminers.

14. In the event that it becomes desirable to utilize a contribution, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs would consult with the donor State or

organization about the proposed project in which the contribution in-kind would be used. The Department will clearly indicate the purpose for which the contribution will be used, the duration for which it will be required, what administrative and logistics facilities will be available to provide support for contributed units and personnel and such administrative details as the daily or monthly subsistence allowances that may be provided to personnel and the legal immunities and privileges personnel will enjoy. The contributor will then be able to take a decision on the use of the contribution and to indicate any case-specific conditions that it desires to attach to its contribution. Once an informal approval from the donor has been received, the United Nations will then make a formal request for the use of the contribution.

IV. REQUIREMENTS

15. United Nations integrated mine-action programmes are broad organizational structures that, in their most comprehensive form, encompass activities in four main areas: programme management, mine clearance, mine awareness and medical treatment and rehabilitation. It is desired that such assistance be provided in a form that can be utilized in the quickest and most flexible manner possible. In the case of personnel, either civilian or military, to be deployed overseas, it would be advantageous that they be provided with their normal administrative, maintenance and support elements, to ensure that they would be as self-sufficient as possible. Logically, contributions to the demining standby capacity can be grouped into four main categories: personnel, equipment, facilities and specialized expertise.

A. Personnel

16. Experts are needed to assist in training local personnel in all the above-mentioned aspects of United Nations mine-action programmes. In addition, personnel skilled in operations within the same areas are needed to provide direct support to United Nations programmes themselves.

17. There is also a need for personnel or units capable of being deployed to accomplish specific tasks in areas where there may not be a large mine-action programme. Such tasks might include conducting assessment missions, mine survey and reconnaissance, providing medical support to mine-clearance operations, establishing communications networks or conducting a variety of training missions.

18. In cases where units are part of a training capacity, it would be desirable that they bring all necessary instructional materials, including classroom supplies. Units designated to serve as an element of a programme until indigenous personnel are trained, such as medical or communications elements, would be expected to arrive fully self-sufficient, with all appropriate equipment.

19. Donors would be responsible for the provision of appropriate insurance for their personnel. The legal status of such personnel would be determined at the time of use, based on discussions between the donor country, the United Nations

and the host country. In general, personnel will be treated as United Nations experts on mission and would enjoy the same privileges and immunities as other United Nations humanitarian staff.

B. Equipment

20. A variety of equipment is needed to support mine-action programmes. Such equipment could be serviceable surplus equipment held in storage, rather than discarded, equipment donated by domestic organizations interested in contributing to mine-clearance efforts or standard Government-owned equipment. The provision of equipment to support the normal deployment needs of demining platoons, such as tents, water trailers, cooking gear, blankets, clothing, beds, etc., will eliminate the need for such equipment to be bought by the programmes themselves and therefore speed up deployment.

21. Similarly, the provision of appropriate vehicles and communication equipment, medical supplies and hospital equipment, etc. will reduce the initial start-up costs of mine-action programmes. Specialized mine-clearance equipment, which meets the standards set by the United Nations demining experts, is also required. Such equipment could include mine detectors, prodders, personal protective gear, grapnels, detonators, explosive charges, etc. In addition, support equipment for use in expanding existing mine-dog programmes, or starting new programmes, is desired.

C. Facilities

22. The designation of facilities within a donor State for the support of mine-action programmes could also be a valuable contribution. The contribution of slots and grants for the specialized training of mine-action programme personnel would provide a flexible method of improving the training of key personnel, as well as providing training and experience that would be difficult to duplicate in the field. Training in medical support and rehabilitation, explosive ordnance disposal, management and logistical support, mine survey - including marking and mapping - and mine-dog training and handling are just a few areas in which instruction could be used to support mine-action programmes. However, it is vital to note that donor countries would be expected to fund the travel and subsistence costs of students as well as providing training.

23. In addition to training facilities, it is hoped that States will contribute facilities to allow for testing and analysis of mine-clearance equipment, as well as research and development establishments to work directly in support of United Nations mine-clearance programmes.

D. Specialized expert assistance

24. While United Nations mine-action programmes have extensive experience in handling normal mine-clearance problems, there is a definite need for specialized expert assistance in some specific areas. The first of these is in the execution of assessment missions. Such assessments require a high degree of

knowledge of mine types, mine-field survey methods and mine-clearance methods. At present, such assessments are conducted for the United Nations by the technical demining experts of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations. However, this office is severely stretched by normal demands, and so assistance in the area of assessments would greatly enhance the United Nations ability to quickly respond to requests for assistance in mine clearance.

25. Another area in which assistance is often needed is in the area of explosive ordnance disposal. Occasionally, United Nations mine-clearance programmes encounter uncommon types of munitions. A classic example of this might be in a United Nations mine-action operation in an area in which chemical munitions are believed to have been used. In such a case, expert advice on what is or is not a chemical munition and on what to do with such munitions is essential. Mine-action programmes also regularly encounter wide varieties of unexploded ordnance, some of which could cause undue destruction if destroyed in place. In such cases, expert assistance would be a great help.

V. CONCLUSION

26. The United Nations demining standby capacity is designed to enable the United Nations to tap effectively into the pool of resources made available by Member States. As such, it is a critical tool for improving the speed and effectiveness with which the United Nations can provide assistance in mine clearance. However, in order to be effective, the demining standby capacity must be simple, streamlined and efficient. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs has designed the standby capacity with these requirements in mind. As structured, the standby capacity is a mechanism for tapping into personnel, equipment, facilities and other resources maintained by Member States, which have designated them for use to support mine action. It is hoped that this mechanism will allow the United Nations to draw upon the vast reservoir of resources available in the international community to improve the effectiveness and speed of United Nations assistance in mine clearance.